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ABSTRACT

The study described here studied perspectives of mid-career teachers from minority and Anglo backgrounds on collaborative intellectual work and examined the ideologies underlying these perspectives. Analysis focused on the teachers' dialogical interaction in a small group (4 teachers) and a large group (28 teachers) in relation to immediate and broader societal contexts and program characteristics. Transcriptions of the teachers' dialogues, dialogue journals, interviews, and final presentations constituted the corpus of discourse. Five perspectives on peer-group-work were identified as the basis for collaborative intellectual work: (1) pragmatic goal-oriented; (2) socio-psychological support; (3) responsive; (4) interpretive community; and (5) vehicle for social change. The group perspective was found to be supportive and responsive, although pervaded by an individualistic and instrumental way of thinking about the individual-group relationship. In this view, knowing, learning, and professional development are essentially individualized processes--"cognitive individualism." Cognitive individualism, held to be the fundamental premise of a capitalist society, represents a culturally endorsed mode of thought and action. The results of this study have implications for education in general and teacher education in particular, especially with regard to team or group approaches to teaching and learning. (Contains 37 references.) (CK)

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# COGNITIVE INDIVIDUALISM: AN IMPEDIMENT TO TEACHERS' COLLABORATIVE INTELLECTUAL WORK

by
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## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In a previous study on teachers' dialogical interaction (Torres, 1995), I found out that when teachers got together in a semi-structured small group, within a context of a mid-career enhancement program, they showed themselves to be very responsive and supportive of each others' experiences, problems and concerns. However, they did not engage in prolonged theoretical discussions on educational issues even though they were capable and the conditions were apparently very favorable for doing so. In a further study (Torres and John-Steiner, 1995), some of the impediments to teachers' involvement in theoretical discussions were examined. The present study goes a step further and includes also large-group conversations, in an attempt to disclose the roots of why teachers miss such opportunities to engage in collaborative highly theoretical work. Here I describe teachers' perspectives on collaborative intellectual work and examine the ideologies underlying those perspectives as well. The analysis of these perspectives includes also their actual group behavior as they engage in dialogical interaction both in a small group (4 teachers) and in a large group (28 teachers). These perspectives and actions are analyzed and interpreted in relation to the context of the situation, the characteristics of the program in which the teachers were involved, and the broad institutional, sociocultural and historical context, having as its theoretical framework the the cultural-historical approach to teachers' collaborative intellectual work.

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## CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO TEACHERS' COLLABORATIVE INTELLECTUAL WORK

The cultural-historical theory was pioneered by Vygotsky (1979, 1987, 1989) and further developed by his students, colleagues and followers. Wertsch (1991) synthesized into three fundamental premises Vygotsky's approach to the study of psychological phenomena: 1) social origins of the individual's mental functioning; 2) human action as mediated by signs and tools; and 3) genetic or historical analysis of the psychological phenomenon in order to understand and explain it. These three premises have been the inspiration of many theoretical and empirical studies. Wertsch himself further develops these ideas to establish the connections between the cultural-historical and institutional processes on one hand and the mediated intermental and intramental processes on the other, establishing in this way micro-macro linkages. Wertsch's (1991, 1994) notion of 'mediated action', which is a further development of Vygotsky's (1979) notion of 'mediational means', somewhat bridges the gap between the micro context and the macro context; that is, between the individual's functioning and his/her sociocultural context. In the same vein, Cole (1985, 1991) elaborates the concept of 'culturally shared cognition' as the medium of convergence between the individual and his/her cultural group.

Most of the research from a Vygotskian perspective has been realized on children's psychological functioning, and only very recently has it begun to be used in the study of socio-cognitive processes in adults. For instance, John-Steiner (1996) has studied collaboration among women social scientists and mathematicians, focusing on the ways they perceive their collaboration. Among the most important features women perceive about their own collaboration are: intense and rich dialogical interaction, intense experience in co-construction of ideas, and that they feel comfortable with their interdependence. Studying the process of collaboration, John-Steiner, Meehan & Kennedy (1996) identified four patterns or modes of collaboration: *distributed, complementary, family* and *integrative,* whose differences are based on the collaborators' values, working methods and role dynamics. Thus in the two more distinctive patterns, whereas the distributed mode of collaboration is characterized by division of roles and labor, the integrative model is characterized by *intellectual interdependence,* defined as an "awareness of the other's resources and knowledge" (p.3).

The study of collaboration may be considered, among other things, as a further development of Vygotsky's idea of ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) among or between scholar colleagues. Moll and Whitmore (1993) also have extended and enriched the notion of ZPD

involving a whole classroom which they call a *collective zone*, intragenerational, involving symmetrical dynamics and mutual teaching among peers. Meanwhile Rogoff (1994) calls these entire groups *learning communities*.

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory may be expanded in this study by including the notion of *dialogue* in Bakhtin (1981, 1986; Todorov (1981)) and Freire (1992). For both of them *dialogue* is the *way of being in the world*. Compatible in its basic premises with Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach and Bakhtin's and Freire's dialogism is Habermas'(1984) Theory of Communicative Action. Central to this theory is the distinction between *goal-oriented action* and *communicative action*, based on his distinction between *instrumental rationality* and *communicative* or *interactional rationality*. He maintains that when human action is driven by the means-ends logic and ways of doing things, everything, including relationships with other human beings, is instrumentalized. In other words they are taken as means to reach certain goals. In contrast, communicative rationality connotes unconstrained dialogue by which participants overcome their subjective views and work toward reaching understanding by mutually raising criticizable claims and giving reasons and evidence to support them. Both *dialogue* and *communicative action* have particular importance in the interpretation of teachers' perspectives on collaborative intellectual work in terms of individual <--> group dialogical-communicative interdependence or intersubjectivity. This implies overcoming the individual subjectivity. Diametrically opposed to this interdependence or intersubjectivity we may find a situation of *cognitive individualism*, which I define as the overvaluing of individual achievements, overemphasis on individual needs and the ways to respond to those needs, at the expense of collaborative intellectual work. Consequently knowing, learning, production of academic knowledge and even professional development are conceived primarily as individualized processes.

Teachers' thought processes constitute an area of research which originated in the cognitive revolution that has occurred in psychology and other domains and spread out over other disciplines such as education. According to Clark and Peterson (1986) and Clark (1986), the basic paradigm used in these earlier studies was the *process-product* or cause-effect model: the effects of teachers' thoughts on their classroom behavior and finally on their students' achievement. Then the focus of research moved toward the study of the content characteristics of teachers' thinking such as teachers' practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1983), teachers' beliefs (O'Loughlin, 1989; Pajares, 1992), and teachers' classroom discourse (Cazden, 1986, 1988; O'Loughlin, 1992a, 1992b). An emerging paradigm for studying teachers' cognitive processes has been elaborated by O'Loughlin (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992a, 1992b), who moves from the

predominantly psychological view of the process to "emancipatory knowledge construction". This includes Freire's (1992) work on the study of pedagogical discourse and the basic principles of social construction of knowledge.

## METHOD

*Participants*

Twenty-eight teachers (26 female, 2 male) who were attending a 14-month mid-career program, teaching at different academic levels from kindergarten to high school, mainstream and special education. Fifteen teachers were from minority groups (2 Native Americans, 1 'Afrolatina' and 12 Chicanas and Mexican Americans. Thirteen participants were Anglo. All of them were working in the public school system of a southwestern city. The small group was composed of four of these 28 teachers, all women of color (2 Chicanas, 1 Native American, and 1 'Afrolatina'), teaching in elementary (2), middle (1) and high school (1). They chose to be in the small group together.

The staff of the program was composed of the coordinator (male) and three support teachers and two graduate assistants, all women. Out of six members of the staff two were from minority groups (1 Hispanic and 1 Mexican American).

*Sources of data*

- Participant observation of the whole-group conversations in the weekly session of the program corresponding to the activities named "open invitation", "commentary" and "discussion", during the last semester.
- Participant observation of the conversations of a four-member group of teachers in the weekly activity called "response group" during one semester.
- Journals, interviews and final presentations of the members of the small group.
- Field notes, mostly as a description of the context of the situation in the weekly session of the program.

The dialogues of the whole group and of the small group were tape recorded and then transcribed. These conversations and the journals, interviews and final presentations constitute the corpus of discourse.

*Context of the dialogues*

The dialogues which form the basis of this study took place in the second period of the mid-career program teachers were attending. These whole-group dialogues as well as the *response group* meetings were planned to provide teachers with opportunities to share classroom experiences and professional concerns, and to comment and reflect on educational issues considered relevant for most of them. These situations are very specific and relevant to the philosophy of the program, which encourages teachers to study their own teaching by means of self-reflecting on it, sharing experiences and knowledge with other teachers, and participating in construction of pedagogical knowledge while building community and networks with other local and distant teachers.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Cognitive individualism, as defined in this study, is very often present in teachers' perspectives on education, teaching, learning, and personal and professional development, as well as in teachers' actual group behaviors. To be able to identify this cognitive individualist attitude, values and beliefs, I took into account three parameters for the analysis of teachers' discourse, together with the field notes and context information:

- Micro-macro, text-context analysis: this includes the analysis of teachers' educational perspectives as set and negotiated in the dialogical interaction, and also the context of the situation, the institutional and broader sociocultural context, in which those perspectives are originated, seeded and embedded.
- Small-group and large-group dialogues: Although the small group was part of the large group, the analysis of discourse was somewhat different in the two groups due to the different nature of their meetings. Thus the results are not strictly comparable, yet they are extended or contrasted from one group to the other.

Although interdependent, it was possible to distinguish between teachers' perspectives as they are played out in their discourse, and their actual group dynamic behavior regarding these same issues. Concerning perspectives, there was carried out an analysis of teachers' perspectives on collaborative intellectual work and related concepts such as social construction of knowledge, individual-group relationships, primary function assigned to teacher peer group, and team teaching.

Meanwhile, the actual group work behavior is characterized by the analysis of asymmetries in talking time, called *dominance* by Linell (1990). There are other behaviors linked to the actual group dynamic behavior such as neglect of the opportunity to do a joint presentation, and no spontaneous mention of other participants' statements.

These perspectives are further interpreted in the light of the institutional and cultural context, including the program of teacher education in which the participants were involved, dominant models of teacher education, structure and organization of the public schools, cultural patterns of interaction especially among teachers and among women, and the ideology of individualism.

With these parameters of analysis in mind, I analyzed the teachers' perspectives on education in general and on collaborative intellectual work in particular. These perspectives are contrasted with the teachers' actual group behaviors and interpreted in the light of the context of the program in which they are involved, and of the broader institutional and sociocultural context and ideologies on group work and collaboration.

**Teachers' perspectives on education**

Understanding perspective as a professional framework of knowledge and interests (Graumann, 1990), and a particular orientation toward an object or topic by a person playing specific roles in a particular situation (Linell and Jönsson, 1992), I was able to identify five broad perspectives in the discourse of these groups of teachers: *pragmatic, individual differences, multiculturalist, socio-constructivist* and *critical* perspectives. Each perspective involves different attitudes toward and ways to deal with collaborative intellectual work.

*Pragmatic perspectives*

Teachers who identify with this perspective focus strongly on the *practical* dimension of the subjects they are talking about: *How to do, what can we do, we need to do* are the constant basis of their arguments and concerns. As a way of illustration, on one occasion the large group was reflecting about the role of the response group in helping each member focus his/her concerns and interests. On this occasion Peter said:

> "As time goes by, I've already found some focuses and I'm far less personally interested in theory in abstract, in abstractions, and I want to be able now to focus on very *practical things* that I can put into my hands and utilize. So I don't want to spend too much time on this kind of vague discussion."

In this perspective *practical things* is what is "real", "relevant" or "important"; in contrast with "ethereal", "humorless", "vague", "intellectual", "philosophical" discussions. Statements like these were uttered more 'loudly' and frequently by the two male participants, although most of the women participants were also concerned and sympathetic with the practical aspects of the issues about which they were talking.

This type of pragmatic perspective was often set in the large-group dialogues but not in the small-group. The perspectives on education of the members of the small group were multiculturalist and/or critical.

*Individual-differences perspectives*

The basic claim of teachers holding this perspective was that *individual differences* or *individual needs* force the adoption of different methods and ways to meet those needs. Here are some of the participants' comments that include this perspective. On one occasion, when the whole group was talking about the dynamics of their own *response group*, Marta emphasized the *differences* among its members and how they work to *meet their needs.*

> "Our group kind of discussed how we really like to work in our response group, how we do *meet our needs*. Because all four of us are very different women and have different needs and different directions that we want to go. Our group only had four people and we had an hour, about an hour to... but we had enough time, we feel. Everyone was able to bring everything we wanted, and help them in their needs (), we were open to others' comments."

Latter on in the semester Lorraine was sharing her reflections with the whole group about how "to prepare a curriculum that is really in keeping with the child's needs". In this respect, Barbara commented about her own literacy program:

> "Basically ah... I think there's a myth that surrounds ah... teaching individualized programs as meeting each student's needs. Ah... because you feel like, oh my gosh! instead of making one program, if I have 25 students, I'm going to have to make 25 programs. Basically what I find is that traditional teachers are just teaching to the group, without consideration for individual needs. They spend an awful lot of time backtracking, in order... you know, because half of class is not going to be up with the teaching. So they backtrack, so they spend an awful lot of time. I feel that if we do the pre-preparation to meet everyone's needs then actually it's... You actually spend less time in developing the programs. I think that's it's a myth that we have to put more work into individualized teaching."

Although linked deeply with a pragmatic stance, *individual-difference perspectives* to some extent imply individualized teaching and therefore the practical ways to meet individual needs within a group of 20 or more students. This perspective also shares with the multicultural perspective the claim and defense of *diversity* among students and therefore the necessity of a curriculum responsive to such diversity. However, from a multicultural

perspective the issue of diversity addresses cultural differences: values, worldviews, language uses and socialization, including of course the individual differences.

*Multiculturalist perspectives*

Most of these teachers are familiar with the *multicultural* view of education in colleges and/or schools. In general terms, the program endorses this perspective as well as the *socio-constructivist* one. These are more complementary than opposing views of education, although a *critical* perspective involves the multicultural, but not vice versa. Teachers identified with a multiculturalist viewpoint argue for *cultural diversity* or *cultural relativism* in talking about students' characteristics and needs, and therefore curriculum relevance. The small-group participants all aligned with this perspective and articulated it extensively. Here are some of their thoughts:

Lola: "One of my passionate interests is human culture and the culture of education". As a teacher she fosters cultural identification in her students, since she has observed that middle school students have a crisis of identity, above all cultural identity. So she has worked specifically on this issue with her students: "All the students are just awakening to the fact that they are culturally influenced".

Mirta: "For me the *multicultural response* as it has evolved in the past four years is my paradigm shift". The basis of this multicultural response is the recognition of racial and cultural pluralism in America. She wrote in her journal:

> "The education of all children will not begin to be relevant until there is a genuine recognition of racial and social diversity. The recognition of and the respect for this diversity, and the manner in which it is addressed, is what should always be at the heart of any discussion on education".

In a *response group* meeting Mirta indicates how the label *multicultural* may be misleading:

> "A myriad of practices fall under the umbrella of multicultural education... Modifications in educational systems tend to occur at the surface level... but the anglocentric assumptions with which schools operate remain unchanged!"

She points out the importance of clarifying the mislabeling of multicultural practices:

> "Multicultural... I think it's just a buzz word now...the 'multicultural' we have now tends to be more what I call the 'piñata syndrome', we want to cook tortillas and make piñatas with the Mexican Americans and then we're gonna cook Chinese rice and talk about the Chinese New Year, and we don't even say Asians but Orientals".

According to a *multicultural* perspective on education, curriculum activities must be responsive to individual needs and therefore to the ethnic characteristics of the students. In this respect Gladys reports the discussion of her small group about the conversation the staff group modeled for participants:

> "One of the things **we** talked about was... how irrelevant was the reading, how irrelevant it would seem to a pregnant adolescent. **We** don't know the ethnic background of the young women. But.. you know those writings are wonderful, but **we** have to have a cultural context for it, and **we** thought that, you know, who would want to read that (classic literature) in view of that particular situation... **We** also talk about what is the value of free writing... who said writing is so important... Maybe some of the *people* have oral traditions and listening for them is much more important than writing".

Nobody disagreed with respect to the importance of considering differences among individuals in planning curricula; however, the teachers were not always addressing the issue of deep cultural differences that support in part those individual differences, but that need to be handled with new strategies if one is to talk of *multicultural education*.

*The socio-constructivist perspectives*

This type of perspective could be considered as the program landmark. Although the concepts were not completely new for the participants, the terminology was new for most of them.

The notion of social construction of knowledge was worked out in operational terms in the form of a small group called a 'response group' or 'interpretive community'. Participants had to bring descriptions of what they were noticing in their classrooms to share with their *interpretive community*. Carole (a staff member) described the process by which teachers may be able to engage in social construction of knowledge as follows:

> "If we can take the situation we are in, learn to notice what's happening in that classroom, take that information and bring it to *a group of people* who have similar knowledge and interests, and share that information, you will be *socially constructing new knowledge* that you can take back to your classroom, back to your (school) system and improve it".

This notion of social construction of knowledge began to be appropriated by this group of teachers in the ways their own frameworks allowed them to assimilate (Piagetian concept) this new paradigm of knowledge.

On one occasion when the participants as a whole group were reflecting on the small-group concept modeled by the staff, Monica indicated a very specific sequence of verbal interactions as "a great example" of their social construction of knowledge.

"There was a situation where Susan started up and said something, and Carole interpreted it from what she heard from Susan and used her own information, and then it was brought back to Susan and she made sense of it with Carole's new input. I thought that was a great example of how knowledge is constructed. And we (like it) a lot".

Monica was the participant who was most aware of and active in pointing out instances of *social construction of knowledge* in the whole-group dialogical interaction.

*The critical perspectives*

Three out of four members of the small group considered themselves as having a critical perspective on education in practice and in theory. In the large group, the critical perspectives were voiced mostly by Gladys who was also a member of the small group.

When teachers were talking of the 'burning questions' they have as the basis of their inquiries and reflections, Gladys, assuming a critical perspective, questioned the roles of minority women in the educational system in these terms:

"Since it's clear that many of us are aware of the triple oppression (gender, race, social class), then how come we continue to work within and for an educational system that is not ours? A system that, until recently, has consciously omitted or inaccurately presented our voices in textbooks? A system that is dominated by male administrators and female educational assistants?"

As indicated above, Mirta was disappointed by the way a multicultural perspective is often reduced to the "pinata syndrome". Thus she counterposes a truly multicultural, antiracist perspective:

"And if you're being antiracist you're not talking about Orientals, you know. You're talking about changing certain precepts, perceptions and language that you use...That doesn't mean that 'multicultural' is bad. I mean, we should talk about lots of cultures. But I'm saying that the perspective has been very limited and very antipolitical".

Lola on her part was very much committed to understanding power relationships in education and to being an advocate of Chicano children and young adults:

"[I] had a renewed commitment to finding a greater understanding of the social and political power relationships specific to public education for children and young adults... I'm impassioned, intellectually, and morally, with issues of education of Chicanos and the underclass".

In the whole-group dialogues, no participants other than those also composing the small group under observation were voicing critical perspectives. This is not to say that there were no other teachers who were identified with the critical perspective that most of the members of

this small group had, but they did not raise their voices to be heard in the whole-group dialogues.

These different perspectives on education undoubtedly imply different perspectives on collaborative intellectual work. In the next section there are presented the teachers' perspectives on collaborative intellectual work as they are talking about teaching, learning, and group-work, in the large group of 28 teachers and in the small group.

**Teachers' perspectives on collaborative intellectual work**

The perspectives of this group of teachers on collaborative intellectual work with other teachers, as well as their strategies for teaching and learning, are framed within their own broad perspectives on education. At any rate, perspectives on collaborative intellectual work were observed when teachers, while reflecting on their own group dynamics, stated directly or indirectly their positions about the primary functions of the group, for them and also for their students. In the small group participants were directly interviewed, individually and as a group, to talk about their perceptions of their own group processes. Meanwhile, the other participants in the large group had a chance to talk about their perception of the dynamics of their own response groups only as a way for the staff to find out what was happening in the response groups, given the fact that these groups were working by themselves.

Perspective differences on collaborative work are bounded by cultural background and gender. Nonetheless there was a large amount of overlapping, therefore the differences appear in the primary focus, strength or function assigned to group work by different teachers. Thus the response group's primary function was perceived as: a) *Support group:* providing mutual socio-psychological support to one another while bonding together; or b) *Responsive group:* reacting to each member's queries and posited problems; or c) *Pragmatic group:* looking at things that work for them in their respective classrooms; or d) *Interpretive community:* for constructing new pedagogical knowledge (program staff's predominant perspective); or e) *Vehicle of social change:* starting to create political awareness and commitments to social and cultural responsiveness and social justice (the small group's predominant perspective). It is important to point out here that these perspectives are reflected and/or constructed in teachers' discourse. Often in this group of teachers, their actual group behavior was not in agreement with their avowed perspectives on these matters.

*Group as socio-psychological mutual support*

When these teachers were asked to reflect on their own response group dynamics they highlighted their own feelings such as "feeling safe and secure", "sense of trust", "validate", "appreciate each others' work" "sympathize with the same problem". In their own voices:

- Monica: "We feel safe, pretty good. I like my *response group*."
- Sonia: "I think we feel very open and very secure and share how we feel."
- Jan: "We liked that every one was heard and every one had a chance to say something. It seems to be a sense of trust."
- Karen: "They just treated me with dignity, I guess, relevance, importance and ... and it was great. Just validate, y'know, my work."
- Karla: "Just sympathize with the same problem. Feeling and struggling with the same problem. Also appreciate each other's work".

These feelings are an important part of their growing group identity, linguistically indexed in the use of the personal pronoun *we*. However, these comments came from participant members of three out of seven groups. In addition, when the small-group members were interviewed they expressed their awareness of sharing perspectives and political stances. They felt that they share concerns and perspectives on education.

In the Fall semester teachers were randomly assigned to a *response group* and there was a permanent staff member sitting with each group. In the Spring semester participants self-selected to be in a specific group to be run by themselves with no direct staff participation. The rationale of this new *response group* scenario which Paul (a staff member) gave the teachers was the necessity "to be able to create and sustain networks without having to rely on anybody who's a member of the university faculty or some staff of the program. We need to believe that we can do this ourselves." Actually, the teachers took this very seriously, and later on when Helen (a staff member) was leading a whole-group dialogue to find out if the *response group* idea was really working, they vigorously defended their own response group's agenda in these terms:

- Barbara: "My group wants to be left alone to support each other, we don't want to be given an assignment, because we'll focus on the assignment instead of what people want to talk about".
- Jack: The *response group* "should be our responsibility".
- Martha: "We know what we want to do".
- Nancy: "Forget about worrying about what we are doing".
- Leena: "I think maybe you think that you are for us a peer support type person, you know, if we need resources, people to contact or articles, where we can get more information. Type, you know, that we can use. If we need some strategies, or ...you know, in our classrooms or wherever, we can go to you, you know. That kind of stuff. You know, if we need help we will ask you, type of thing."
- Lorraine: "We've talked about teachers not having time to talk. So..."

*Responsive or reacting group*

Teachers perceived their *response groups* as the social situation for "getting feedback" or "reactions", being helped in "narrowing focus", "clarifying focus", "synthesizing ideas", "refining guesses", "getting ideas for solving a problem", among others. Here are some of their comments:

- Teresa: "Everybody helped me a lot in reacting to my reading... They were very eager to help me."
- Karla: In my teaching "there are things that are happening that shouldn't be happening, you know. I'm getting feedback which is really good."
- Martha: "I thought that what we are doing in the classroom is so isolated, just we need maybe being heard by somebody else."
- Pam: The *response group* is a "practical way of refining our guesses".

These comments show teachers' awareness of how individuals benefit from being in their *response group*. However, the sense of ownership of the specific individual's problems and their solutions is quite obvious in Carmen's, Liz's and Martha's statements:

- Carmen: "I personally don't feel that something that the group has to do is to solve the problem. I feel better when I get ideas that help me solve the problem."
- Liz: "How we see us is so different from what we really are. And so that input of our team is gonna be important. I'm really looking forward to that."
- Martha: "We just went ahead and brought our concerns because we don't need to get consensus, because all four of us are very different women and have different needs and different directions that we want to go."

Although each member may benefit from it, approaching symmetrical benefits, there is no sense of reciprocity in terms of the benefits the group may get from the questions, problems and experiences brought by individuals; even less is there an awareness of the possibility of further development of shared perspectives and concerns.

Nevertheless, some participants are more aware of their shared needs and problems, and that therefore they should work together for shared solutions as well:

Karla: "It's not just bringing something far out to... to this community, but it's hitting that mutual need and everybody realizing that you have the same needs that I do, let's reason together and see how we can solve this."

Although Karla is more aware of sharing concerns and joint development, she is implying that a central function of the group is to share and solve problems. Actually, having a personal problem or to share a problem seems to be a good reason for being in such a group. Facing a problem and being able to solve it with the assistance of the group is the common motive to perceive the group as very responsive to their queries.

*Pragmatic group*

In actual terms, the view of group work as predominantly responsive is pragmatic to a great extent. Nevertheless, there were participants, mostly Peter's group, who focused almost exclusively on the "practical things", "what works for us". When Peter's group was asked to report what they had noticed in the response group modeled by the staff, Lorena, Peter and Liz responded with the comments:

> - Lorena: "We didn't talk about the group much at all. We just immediately started talking about what we're doing now in our response group."
> - Peter: "I think that in our group what we had discussed was that we are looking for more practical things that we can use in our classrooms, where our needs are, and not that kind of intellectual discussion."
> - Liz: "What will be applicable to a classroom with ah... Let's say with 28 kids in physical sciences."

Undoubtedly, this unwillingness to engage in discussion beyond discourse centered on *how to do things* in the classroom or applicable to the classroom represents an impediment to collaborative intellectual work. This attachment to 'procedural' kinds of knowledge (Belenky's *et al* 1986 notion), in downgrading theoretical discussions not directly related to classroom practice, diminishes to a great extent the possibility of engaging in collaborative intellectual work, and may represent an anti-intellectual attitude.

*Interpretive community:*

This implies jointly interpreting experiences. As noted above, the program's predominant perspective on education is the socio-constructivist one. The staff set up the *response group*, defined as an *interpretive community,* as a basic activity for sharing classroom experiences and intellectual concerns, and for building community. In this way teachers will be able to *construct pedagogical knowledge,* which constitutes the ultimate goal of *response groups.* Perspectives on group work seen as an interpretive community was almost exclusively set on the part of the staff and only one participant (Monica). Here are some of their statements:

> - Carole: "This is an example of how people come together, with their noticing, observations, they come together with their knowledge, they can come up with *new knowledge.*"
> - Monica: (In a conference with one of her student's parents): "We started talking and we started sharing my philosophy, how I believe in equality in my classroom and so we really constructed this knowledge base."
> - Paul: "We believe that you can't automatically become harder in what we're calling the *interpretive community.* We need practice in being members of a group like that... Interpretive community isn't automatically good and healthy. It's only good and healthy to the extent of the *diversity* of approaches, perspectives, opinions brought to bear on an issue and question. It's also healthy to the point that the group comes to recognize when it needs help."

- Helen: "We felt that one of the roles of the response group is to help you to come up with new knowledge, to articulate, y'know, what your beliefs are... We're sharing information... We all have some shared concerns. Another thing is the impact of the group in how the person is going to perceive differently her/his classroom afterwards, at the level of noticing or it occurs at a deeper level... We felt that there's knowledge that is drawn from the conversation. And we liked it."
- Paul: Interpretive communities that are already functioning have to be able to create and sustain networks.

Later on in the Spring semester teachers were talking about the importance of teaching students how to learn. Paul referred, somewhat pessimistically, to the central idea of social construction of knowledge.

> "I guess I'll spend my life saying that the only knowledge that really matters in the end, is knowledge that we construct together about our lives... We don't really believe the stuff about constructing knowledge... We don't believe that there's a better way to do schools. We deeply distrust the notion of constructed knowledge. You don't believe that."

Actually, Paul was envisioning the lack of appropriation of the 'stuff' of social construction of knowledge by participants, thus diminishing the possibility of building and maintaining a true interpretive community. He also could be envisioning the absence of proper conditions in the schools for these interpretive communities to take place.

*Group work as a vehicle for social change:*

Participants in the small group, mainly Gladys, Lola and Mirta, were much aligned with a critical perspective on education and therefore they conceived collaborative intellectual work as central to true educational reform. Each of the members of this 'response group' talked, both spontaneously and as prompted by my questions, about group work, their own group experiences, or the application of group work in their classrooms. Let's see some of the statements that arose in this respect.

*Lola*: She is Chicana and teaches math and science in Middle School. She is fighting against her "nature" to be independent:

> "I will do what I can for them [family members, teachers]. But it's really hard to approach others for help... It's my own nature to be independent... I believe human beings can accomplish so much more interdependently... Cooperation is a condition for any social change to occur."

She finds it easier to work on her own. "It's hard to work cooperatively. It's so much easier to be on your own, you don't have to negotiate, you don't have to compromise". Her struggle is very conscious: "So I'm struggling with these things, but I am very happy to be aware of

that". She understands the problems students have to engage in cooperative learning. Lola is thoroughly aware of her tendency to do things on her own, what she calls her 'natural independence'. She is eagerly into the process of getting to work interdependently, not only at the level of learning and growing intellectually but as an essential requirement for promoting social transformations.

*Gladys:* She is a native American and teaches social sciences in high school. She expresses her conviction about the necessity and the power of collaborative work for social change...

> "Collaborative work is a powerful vehicle for social change...but for me group work is very hard for me to do. I don't like group work. I don't like to do collaborative work... It takes too much energy to try to work with other people. And I'm very picky about whom I like to work with. I don't like people to choose for me who's in my group. I like to choose my own people to be in my group."

She attributed this attitude to the culture of individuality with which she has had to live:

> "Many of us have been socialized to be individuals. And I don't know if it has to do with the economy, capitalism, this whole notion of individuality that we're taught, that the individual comes first, before the group. Or if it's because people are so diverse, that we have so many sub-perspectives it's hard to reach a consensus".

She brought up the occasion on which she rejected working collaboratively with Mirta and Lola in their 'response group': "Even now, working with Mirta and Lola, I think you heard me when I said: Well, I'm doing my thing, and you guys do whatever you want to do. You know. And they're good friends and everything".
Gladys was the participant who most explicitly expressed her perception of the group limitations on engaging in issues:

> "In terms of the large group, I saw at times, maybe two or three times, that we met on Thursday morning, and came really close to having a dialogue. But I always saw that there was always some kind of obstacle, either time limitations or time constraints, or... or something happening that disrupted that point that really we came to talk about how we felt. Not our emotions, but intellectually; how we felt about certain issues or whatever... But in the small group, our group, I really enjoyed it. We attempted to get there. But again the time constraint was the main thing. We didn't have enough time. But I think our group had the potential, more potential than the large group".

*Mirta*: She is an 'Afrolatina' and teaches first grade. She uses working groups and whole-group discussions on a daily basis with her first grade class. She was willing to make up teams for the final presentation which was a requirement of the program. However, Gladys rejected the idea and did not go through with it. She considers the interaction in small groups as "an opportunity for learning because each has her area of expertise". She was the

participant who expressed disagreement most openly with other members of the group, although in a friendly mood.

*Jenny:* She is Chicana and teaches second grade. Cooperative groups constitute her main pedagogical strategy, a way to facilitate children's learning and her own teaching: "It just makes it easier for the kids...It's easier for me, because I can reach children so much better". Besides, she thinks that children feel more comfortable talking in a small group than in a large group, as she does. She is extending to all her classes the strategy of working groups.

With respect to the 'response group', Jenny felt very good, although at times there was talk on issues that were not pertinent: "I learned so much stuff that I never would have otherwise but sitting in this group". Jenny illustrates nicely a case study of learning in the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD), in accordance with Vygotsky's terminology. She grasped concepts like 'cultural awareness', 'political awakening' and 'liberating education' as a result of her participation in this response group. She is aware of the impact of the response group on her.

In general terms, the 'response group' had a different function as perceived by each participant, not necessarily for all of them related to collaborative intellectual work. Lola attached to the 'response group' the function of helping her develop her classroom research project for the 'Teacher Research' course. Mirta saw the 'response group' meeting as a relaxing situation for sharing feelings and thoughts after being disappointed by some participants' ways of thinking in the whole-group conversations. Jenny wanted her response group to follow the agenda suggested by the program staff. Gladys, on her part, confessed to me that she did not take the response group conversations "seriously". Participants had very individualized expectations of the response group work, although they were aware of shared ideologies and perspectives on education. Although they were happy to be in this group and developed a group identity, they rarely got into sustained and deep intellectual conversations. I think that if they had really believed in their potential as a group for engaging in true collaborative intellectual work, they would have taken advantage of the opportunity to meet together, exploiting the members' willingness to help each other to move in the direction of producing new knowledge as a result of the group interaction. This is not to say that they were doing nothing: they were very supportive of one another, they helped each other solve the problems posed by the members of the group. For three of its members, the group had primarily a socio-psychological function and not so much a cognitive challenging function. For Jenny, the fourth member, many of the conversations were an intellectual challenge, as mentioned above.

This undervaluing of the intellectual potential of a group like this 'response group' by its own members is the result of a long history of cognitive individualism throughout school and college years, and then in the organization and structure of the school in which they are working essentially in isolation. Although nowadays there is an increasing acceptance of the social origins of cognitive functioning as a fundamental principle of human development, of ways of knowing, learning and thinking, and which is the basic premise of the program teachers are attending, there is still a lot to do in this respect.

**Collaborative intellectual work: Discrepances between discourse and action.**

To have a perspective on a given matter does not necessarily imply that the same person(s) does not also have other perspectives on the same matter, including contradictory perspectives and discrepancies between discourse and action. There were some mismatches in the program itself between the basic model and the socio-constructivist perspective they were embracing, and also between teachers' perspectives on group work and actual teacher group behavior.

*Double message of the program*

The staff of the program constantly encouraged teachers to share experiences, to engage in construction of knowledge, to build networks and communities, and so on, as indicated above. Actually, the program staff were in some sense fighting against isolation and individualism. However, the basic model upon which the program was built consisted of three circles: teacher, learner, person, whose intersection is the *self;* that is, *self* as a teacher, *self* as a learner, and *self* as a person. The diagram of this model was constantly displayed in the classroom where the teachers had their weekly meetings during the course of the program. Despite all the efforts of the program staff in planning to facilitate interaction and full engagement in joint activities for social construction of knowledge, the model upon which they were relying essentially enhanced individual reflection and development. Thus the response group or the other activities based on small groups became considered primarily as means means to meet individual goals. That may explain some pretty obvious differences between individual accomplishments and group accomplishments.

*Teachers' actual group behavior*

Teachers' perspectives on collaborative intellectual work as presented above may give us the impression that they were really very enthusiastic and positive working in groups. Besides the

*response group* there were also *reading groups* and *adventurous learning groups*, although they were not asked to reflect about those groups in the form of a whole-group dialogue. Nevertheless, there were evident discrepancies between participants' specific perspectives and their actual group behavior. By 'actual group behavior' I mean their awareness of a balanced distribution of turns and/or talking time, as well their willingness to take advantage of the opportunities set up by the program staff to do collaborative intellectual work.

*Asymmetrical distribution of turns and talking time:* There was observed an uneven distribution of turns and/or talking time by participants in both the small-group and the whole-group dialogues. In Table 1 there are presented for the small group the total time and the percentage of time each participant talked on each topic. Two or more of these topics constitute an episode or weekly meeting of the response group. In Table 2, for the whole group, there are presented the topics of the dialogues, the participants in them, the number of utterances per participant, and the number of long utterances. A long utterance was counted when a turn had more than two speech acts or more than 5 lines in the transcript.

As we can see in Table 1 and Table 2, there was a tendency toward an asymmetrical number of utterances and/or talking time among participants in both groups, although this asymmetry is much more marked in the large group. Linell (1990) calls this type of asymmetry *dominance*, specifically *amount of talk dominance*. In the small group the participant who introduced a dialogue/topic was, most of the time, the person with the major talking time on that topic. In contrast, in the large group the general topics were set up, with few exceptions, by the staff of the program, and teachers volunteered to participate. Looking at participants in each dialogue, there are only a few names, considering the potential number of 28 plus six staff members. Moreover, some names (Peter, Paul (staff), Martha, Monica, Karla, Liz) are repeated throughout the dialogues; among them, Peter, Paul and Martha often took long turns. In the small-group interview Lola referred to this dominance as "monopolizing time":

> "I wasn't particularly comfortable with the large group. I made a real effort the second semester not to talk too much... Sort of people ah... monopolizing. There was a couple of people that talked most of the time. I just, I didn't want to see myself monopolizing time. I really didn't want to do that."

*Missed opportunities:* Regarding the missed opportunities to do collaborative work with other teachers, only two out of 28 actually did a joint presentation, despite being encouraged to do so by the staff. In the small group, as indicated above, Mirta asked Gladys and Lola if they were going to do a joint presentation, and Gladys rejected this possibility. Finally everyone did an individual presentation. Afterwards Lola, Mirta and Gladys agreed that they would

Table 1. Topics in *response group* dialogues: Introduction and talking time per participant

| Seq. No. | Epi. No. | Topic/ Dialogue | Introduced by * | Talking time (min.) | Percent talking time per participant | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Lo | Mi | Gl | Je | My |
| 1 | 1 | Multicultural education in first grade | Mi(1) | 24.1 | 10 | 68 | 7 | 15 | 0 |
| 2 | | Interactive and reflective pedagogy in social science | Gl(1) | 15.3 | 14 | 1 | 63 | 22 | 0 |
| 3 | | Club of Middle School students | Lo(1) | 10.3 | 76 | 5 | 12 | 7 | 0 |
| 4 | | Collaborative groups | Je(1) | 6.4 | 6 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 93.5 | 0 |
| 5 | 2 | Problems of ESL Middle Schoolers | Lo(1),Gl(1) | 5.0 | 47 | A | 22 | 27 | 4 |
| 6 | | Interpersonal relations in her high school class | Gl(1) | 10.4 | 22 | A | 65 | 9 | 4 |
| 7 | | Small-group learning | Je(1) | 5.8 | 12 | A | 23 | 64 | 1 |
| 8 | 3 | Cultural books for high schoolers | Je(1) | 5.3 | 6 | 3 | 49 | 42 | 0 |
| 9 | | Planning study group on ethnographic research | Gl(1) | 8.3 | 15 | 24 | 52 | 2 | 7 |
| 10 | 4 | Freire's work | Lo(1) | 4.1 | 41 | 27 | 5 | 12 | 15 |
| 11 | | Ethnographic observation in class | Lo(1) | 14.0 | 26 | 29 | 16 | 1 | 28 |
| 12 | 5 | Grant proposal for lending library | Je(1) | 14.8 | 15 | 58 | A | 23 | 4 |
| 13 | | Antiracist education proj. | Mi(1) | 22.4 | 10 | 64 | A | 2 | 24 |
| 14 | 6 | Burning questions: how to get teachers into action | Je(3) | 1.7 | 2 | 1 | 11 | 86 | 0 |
| 15 | | Is my classroom a 'home-place'? | Mi(2) | 4.3 | 29 | 65 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| 16 | 6 | Did you read the copyrights? | Mi(1) | 1.3 | 18 | 70 | 4 | 8 | 0 |
| 17 | | *Machismo* | Je(1) | 4.6 | 0.2 | 58 | 0.4 | 37 | 4.4 |
| 18 | | What do you do with your rage? | Mi(1) | 1.5 | 0 | 79 | 20 | 1 | 0 |
| 19 | 7 | Teacher research class | Gl(1) | 10.5 | 16 | 16 | 67.7 | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| 20 | | Why do you like this response group? | Mi(1) | 3.8 | 10 | 13 | 37 | 40 | 0 |
| 21 | | Lola's classroom research project | Lo(1) | 17.7 | 35 | 14 | 26 | 10 | 15 |
| | | Totals | | 211.6 | 28 | 28 | 21 | 16 | 7 |

* Numbers in parentheses indicate times this topic was introduced. A = absent

Table 2. Whole-group dialogues: Topic, talking time, and participants' total number of utterances per dialogue

| *Topic/dialogue* | *Total time Minutes* | *Number of utterances per participant* |
|---|---|---|
| Process-folio and assessment | 42 | Paul (S,4,3L), Peter (4, 2L), Martha (4), Gladys (3,1L), Susan (6), Liz (2,1L), Rossi (2), Debora (2), Mary, Carole, Monica (1 each). |
| Own response-group dynamics | 10 | Lupe (4), Sonia (S,4), Peter (3), Monica (2), Karla, Paul, Liz, Gladys, Rossi (1 each) |
| Program assessment | 35 | Paul (S,17,7L), Liz (6, 1L), Monica (3), Rossi (3), Peter (2,1L) Carole (2), Helen (2), Martha (1L), Debora, Leena (1 each) |
| Drug prevention program | 40 | Peter (4,3L), Martha (4,3L), Mery (S,4, 1L), Karla (3,2L), Teresa (2), Lola (2,1L), Helen (2,1L), Liz (2,1L), Guille, Karen, Rossi (1 each) |
| Interpretive community | 38 | Carole (S,11,2L), Monica (5,1L), Martha (4,2L), Susan (4), Peter (4,3L) |
| Perception of the response group modeled | 53 | Paul (S,2,1L), Peter (2,1L), Gladys (2,1L), Linda (2,1L), Karen (2), Debora (2), Liz (2,1L), Karla (2,1L), Susan (2) Jack (1L), Martha (1L), Monica, Nancy, Lorena, Helen, Carole, Carmen, Rossi (1 each) |
| Own response group work | 28 | Helen (8), Debora (3, 1L), Karen (4), Peter 3, 2L), Martha (1L) |
| Own response group work and feelings | 18 | Helen (22), Lola (9), Karla (6,1L), Peter (4,3L), Gladys (4), Teresa (5), Barbara (4), Martha (3,1L), Pam (3), Jack (3), Leena, Monica, Paul (2 each), Carole, Nancy and Lupe (1 each) |

Within parentheses: S = Staff member; first number = total number of utterances; second number and L (if any) = number of Long utterances

have been able to do more integrated presentations if they had been more aware of their common perspectives.

Spontaneous mention of other participants' statements was quite rare both among the large-group and the small-group participants. This does not mean that they had not been influenced and built on others' utterances. The only recorded instance of this was Mirta who, without mentioning any name, states a counterargument in her journal: "No, we are not the system". It was obvious that she was referring to Martha's claim: "We are the system". In addition, and as indicated above, Jenny appropriated several ideas and terms from the other members of the response group. In an interview she also recognized the influence of the group, especially from Mirta:

> I found that she had something that I could apply. To do more.. that's my... how can do you go about making the children more aware of their culture at a small age? This lady [Mirta] is not... she didn't care about... She didn't care (laughs) with, with the administration, what the administration said to her. But for me I do, you know. She gave like encouragement, you know."

*Avoidance of or escape from open disagreement:* As groups engage in dialogical interaction, different members may have different perspectives with regard to the issue they are talking about. Nonetheless, open disagreement among participants concerning their perspectives on a given matter was infrequent, especially in the small group. Actually, in the small group there was presented only one episode of open disagreement regarding an issue they were talking about. This was followed by a very quick negotiation. In contrast, in the large group there were five public events of disagreement; three of them were raised by the two male participants against female staff members. The other two occurred between Gladys and Martha, and between Gladys and Karla. There is no doubt that there were many more events of disagreement among participants and between them and the staff, but they either were not voiced or the staff quickly diverted the conversations or ended the dialogue. At any rate, the fact of missing the opportunities to negotiate different perspectives is in itself an impediment to group work.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The perspectives of this group of teachers on collaborative intellectual work resembles, using Bakhtin's metaphor, a 'polyphony' of voices -- different teachers' voices and different voices of the same teacher, and voices of the tradition of thought and discourse in education, and specifically on group-work that emerge through their individual voices. However, not all the

voices were heard, nor was I able to find out what they all were and why some remained silent, since time restrictions prevented my interviewing participants in the large group. From those perspectives that were voiced I was able to identify five different types of perspectives on the peer-group-work basis of collaborative intellectual work: 1) *pragmatic goal-oriented;* 2) *socio-psychological support;* 3) *responsive;* 4) *interpretive community;* and 5) *vehicle for social change*.

These perspectives differ in terms of the predominant function attributed to peer-group-work in the context of the program in which these teachers were involved. Hence peer-group-work has different degrees of relevance and necessity: from being considered as an ancillary activity, that is, an alternative way of finding out what works in classrooms (1); to being very desirable (2); useful (3); an actual way of knowing (4); or the *sine qua non* condition for social change (5).

Teachers' understandings of peer-group-work are in many ways connected with important ideologies regarding human interaction. Therefore their perspectives on these matters, except (4) above, *interpretive community,* put emphasis on group work as a means to meet individual needs (1,2,3) or social needs (5). In this respect Habermas' (1984) distinction between goal-oriented action and communicative action helps us to see how the emphasis on means and ends or goals is intimately tied to an instrumental way of reasoning. This instrumental rationality, he argues, is an ideology developed along with technology and science in capitalist societies. Accordingly, human interaction is conceived of and practiced with the logic of *means* and *ends*, in which efficiency and competitiveness are the main reasons and justification for human action. The revival of interest in social matters -- cooperative learning, social cognition, shared cognition, collaboration, team teaching, community building, social construction of knowledge, among other forms -- has not always occurred because of a recognition of the inherent social nature of human beings, but because groups or teams are a more effective and competitive way of doing things. Groups are therefore means to reach the goal of more productivity and efficiency.

In accordance with this instrumental understanding of human interaction is the belief that a group is the *sum* of its members. This kind of *additive* model is rooted in an individualist ideology of groups, by which being 'complete' individuals precedes being 'good' members of a social group. This perspective on groups was presented to this group of teachers as a theoretical framework by a guest speaker, prior to the presentation on response groups and building communities. From such a perspective, the development of a self-sufficient

individual is a highly valued goal. Consequently, and by contrast, the idea of *interpretive community*, has no greater role than that of a *means* to reach the *goal* of *individual autonomy*.

In this respect, my major claim is that *cognitive individualism* is precisely the understanding of collaborative intellectual work, specifically peer-group-work, predominantly as a *means* or *instrument* to meet individual needs; of groups as the *sum* of their members; and of *full individual development* as a necessary condition to be 'good' members of a social group.

I think that there is more than one alternative to *cognitive individualism*. The diametrically opposed view to cognitive individualism would be that in which individual identities, needs and efforts are lost and the only voice heard becomes the group's: a kind of 'groupism'. Neither seems to capture the dynamic interdepence between individual and social group. The perspective basis I am advocating is a *dialogical-communicative interdependence* of the *individual <--> group:* neither individualism nor groupism. *Dialogical-communicative interdependence* implies first of all that the individuals become individuals because of their relation with others. Bakhtin (cited by Todorov, 1981) states with deep understanding this *individual <--> 'other'* dialogical interdependence:

> "At first I am conscious of myself through others: they give me the words, the forms and the tonality that constitute the first image of myself... Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for loss of the self... It turns out that every internal experience occurs in the border, it comes across another, and this essence resides in this intense encounter. The very being of man [and woman] (both internal and external) is a *profound communication. To be* means *to communicate ... to be* means to be for the *other* and through him [her], for myself" (p. 96, italics in the original, brackets added).

When Bakhtin states "*To be* means *to communicate*" he is actually proclaiming the sense and reality of human existence. Bakhtin put in the "otherness" the condition of existence of the individual consciousness. The same type of ontological statement is made by Freire (1992) in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed. For him dialogue is an "existential necessity of human beings, one form of overcoming their incompleteness". In this same vein, Taylor (1989) develops the notion of *self:* "One is a self only among other selves".

In actual terms, Bakhtin's, Freire's and Taylor's notion of individual/group relationships goes beyond merely a group-work perspective, it is an alternative world view. Bonetskaya (1993) finds connections between Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue and the varieties of *dialogism* which appeared in Europe by the decade of the 1920s. The common basic claim of these philosophies is the definition of being as "*being-in-relation*" which counterposes the notion of

"objective substantial being", the basis of individualist accounts, held by the philosophies following Emmanuel Kant. As we can see, the principles of *dialogism* are somewhat incompatible with those of *individualism,* the philosophy which claims that the sense of human existence is to be self-sufficient individuals, and therefore the ultimate goal is an existence independent of others.

Regarding this issue of *intellectual interdependence*, John-Steiner, Meehan and Kennedy (1996) found that it is the distinctive characteristic of the *integrative pattern of collaboration:* "characterized by braided roles (i.e., completely interchangeable), the construction of shared ideologies, and a unified voice". To develop intellectual interdependence while producing new theories and practices requires time on the part of collaborators. Meanwhile, in what they call "distributed approaches" characterized by division of labor and roles, there exists not interdependence but complementarity.

In light of the individual/group *dialogical-communicative interdependence*, disagreement or socio-cognitive conflict plays an important role in moving participants to refine their positions, to negotiate, to bring in more information, to go deeper in the analysis, to challenge for elaboration and justification and so on. In this respect, Kruger's (1993) study sheds light on the importance of both conflict and collaboration for real movement of thought in dialogue participants. The noticeable absence of disagreement in the present study, mostly in the small group, is something that deserves special analysis. In addition, of the few events (5) of disagreement that occurred in the large group, three were protagonized by the two male participants. This leads us to think that women teachers avoid disagreement, which implies that they underestimate the value of it for collaborative work. Belenky *et al* (1986) found that, by and large, women of all cultures dislike academic debates. I argue that socially constructed female roles concerning these forms of verbal interaction put the more dynamic members of a group into jeopardy of being marginalized or marginalizing themselves. Since in any group there are always different perspectives on a given matter, if the members always try to avoid disagreement, their thinking about the subject in question is going to advance very little, although they may be able to carry out quickly any specific tasks assigned to them, through division of labor and not having to spend time in discussing and negotiating perspectives on the given issues.

I think it is important to clarify here the point of women and disagreement. My main concern in this respect is the 'softness' role socially constructed and attributed to women in many arenas including intellectual matters. Open disagreement is usually seen in women as

something "rude" (here I am using the term that the staff used to describe Gladys' behavior, when she voiced her disagreements with other participants) and therefore not very "female". As Ochs (1993) maintains, the relation between language and gender is not direct, but mediated by social activities and stances which constitute gender meanings. By calling for rethinking this 'distinctive characteristic' of women I am not implying that women need to become 'hard' like men, or to engage in 'hard' sciences. What I am willing to do as teachers' educator is to bring these issues into discussion by teachers, creating an atmosphere that facilitates disagreement and intellectual challenges within a collaborative spirit.

In conclusion, the perspectives of this group of teachers on collaborative intellectual work may be characterized as very supportive and responsive, although still pervaded by an individualist and instrumental way of thinking about the *individual* <--> *group* relationship: a tendency to consider groups as means to meet individual needs, groups as the sum of independent individuals, and groups composed of self-sufficient individuals. In this way, knowing, learning and professional development are essentially individualized processes. I have called this enduring feature of intellectual work *cognitive individualism*, characterized by high emphasis on individual effort, individual needs and individual achievements at the expense of collaborative intellectual work with one's colleagues.

Since this overemphasis on the individual is the fundamental premise of a capitalist society, teacher education plays an important role in such socialization. In this specific case, the mid-career program in which these teachers were participating projected two contradictory messages. On the one hand, its basic model is an exaltation of the development of the *self*: *self* as teacher, *self* as learner and *self* as person. On the other hand, the program staff very often encouraged teachers to share experiences, to engage in co-construction of educational knowledge, and to build networks and community. Thus, the first message indicated a deep commitment to an ideology of individualism (individual achievements and development pre-exist and override those of the group), to which cognitive individualism is ultimately linked, whereas the program staff was somewhat half-heartedly fighting against it. In addition, individual accountability was the basic means of assessment of this group of teachers. As ordinarily happens, the assessment system to a great extent drives the curriculum planning and development. I think that in this specific case individual accountability reinforced the individualist view of peer-group-work as a means to facilitate individual achievements. In the same vein, Wertsch *et al* (1993) calls this 'analytical priority' of the individual, in studying group dynamics, 'methodological individualism'.

## IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

The results of this study have implications for education in general and teacher education in particular, concerning issues such as: "Team teaching", "Cooperative learning", "Working groups", "Teachers' study groups", "Co-construction of knowledge" and so on. All of these strategies could be no more than another fad if we are not aware of the great obstacle that *cognitive individualism* represents as a culturally and institutionally shaped and endorsed way of thinking and acting. The currently increasing emphasis on the social origins of cognition and human activity in general may be a counter-offensive way of thinking and acting, although very often these good intentions remain a rhetorical discourse and do not go further to thematize, examine critically, and work systematically to change those individualist attitudes.

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